BILL SALI
1ST DISTRICT, IDAHO

COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

508 CANNON BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-6611

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

DISTRICT OFFICES:

802 W. BANNOCK, STE 101
BOISE, ID 83702
(208) 336-9831

610 W. HUBBARD, STE 206
COEUR D'ALENE, ID 83814
(208) 667-0127

313 D STREET, STE 101
LEWISTON, ID 83501
(208) 743-1388

704 BLAINE STREET, STE 1
CALDWELL, ID 83605
(208) 454-5602

March 19, 2007

Dear Colleague:

All of us are touched by loved ones and friends afflicted with disease and serious illness. And all of us want them to obtain the best possible treatment, as soon and as effectively as possible.

Stem cells can be derived from myriad sources, ranging from umbilical cord blood and human fat to dental pulp and amniotic fluid. Of course, they can also be obtained from human embryos.

The difference? In addition to the moral problem of treating nascent persons as property without intrinsic human rights, adult stem cell research have been used in human applications for more than 70 diseases. From embryonic stem cells, no therapies have been derived – not one.

Stem cell research offer great promise. Yet embryonic stem cell research seemingly has been exalted to almost a mystical state of medical hope that it just does not deserve. Former Senator John Edwards even claimed that through ESC treatments, the late Christopher Reeve would "Get up out of that wheelchair and walk again."

Such assertions, however heartfelt, fail the joint tests of ethical acceptability and medical science. Adult stem cell research, while not reaching the level of Sen. Edwards' purported miracle cure, offers genuine and morally sound hope for the millions of Americans who suffer from many ailments.

Please take a moment to read the attached *Wall Street Journal* article by Princeton scholar Robert George and bioethicist Rev. Thomas Berg titled, "Six Stem Cell Facts." It debunks some common misunderstandings about ESC research and why adult stem cell research is a far more useful avenue of research and treatment.

Sincerely,

Bill Sali

Bill Sali

WSJ.com THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. ONLINE

March 14, 2007

Six Stem Cell Facts
By ROBERT P. GEORGE and REV. THOMAS V. BERG, L.C.
March 14, 2007; Page A15

Americans are divided over the question of whether it is morally acceptable to authorize by law, and fund with taxpayer dollars, research in which human embryos are destroyed.

Stating that such research "crosses a moral boundary that our decent society needs to respect," President Bush vetoed legislation last summer that would have expanded federal funding of human embryonic stem cell (ESC) research. This January, in a first step toward reviving that vetoed legislation, the House of Representatives voted 253-174 to pass a similar bill. The Senate is expected to consider the measure this week.

Candid observers should admit that public discussion of this emotional issue has too often lacked intellectual honesty. This has only compounded the confusion naturally arising from an issue of great scientific and moral complexity. Consequently, we propose six facts on which people on either side of the moral debate should be able to agree:

- There is no "ban" on human embryonic stem cell research in the United States.

This has been arguably the most muddled point in the entire debate. ESC research goes on at labs throughout the country, with no legal barriers to prohibit such research or the private financing of it. The federal government has funded ESC research to the tune of $130 million dollars since 2001, and the U.S. continues to be the international leader in the field. Out of all peer-reviewed research papers published from 1998 through 2005 on original human ESC research, scientists from the U.S. published by far the most, 125 of the 315.

- We are a long way away from therapies derived from embryonic stem cells.

James Thompson, the first scientist to derive stem cells from a human embryo, made this point clearly just a few weeks ago: "I don't want to sound too pessimistic because this is all doable, but it's going to be very hard." He added, "those transplantation therapies should work but it's likely to take a long time." Leading British stem cell expert Lord Winston has been even more blunt: "I am not entirely convinced that embryonic stem cells will, in my lifetime, and possibly anybody's lifetime, for that matter, be holding quite the promise that we desperately hope they will."

There are currently no controlled human clinical trials underway for ESC-derived therapies. By contrast, there are currently some 1200 clinical trials underway associated with human adult stem cells (ASCs). While most treatments derived so far from ASC research apply to blood-related diseases, the broader application of ASCs for a more diverse array of maladies is likely within several more years.

- The human embryo has at least some degree of special moral status.

"We believe most would agree that human embryos deserve respect as a form of human life. . . ." So said President Clinton's National Bioethics Advisory Committee, speaking of ESC research. The committee was willing to support the use of "excess" embryos from assisted reproduction clinics, but only if their use was necessary to advance life-saving research. It did not endorse the creation of embryos by cloning or other methods for use in research involving their destruction.

Standard embryology texts insist that from the zygote (single-cell embryo) stage forward there exists a new living member of the species homo sapiens. Surely we can all agree that the human embryo possesses the active potential to develop by an internally developed process towards maturity, and that this is morally significant.

- There are non-controversial alternatives worth exploring.

It is increasingly clear that there are non-embryo destructive research alternatives that hold out the promise of providing sources of stem cells with properties equivalent to, or nearly equivalent to, embryonic cells. Such alternatives include, among others, the reprogramming of ordinary somatic (body) cells, *the derivation of stem cells from amniotic fluid, and (assuming that it can be shown that the product is not an embryo), altered nuclear transfer.*

- Concerns about embryo destruction are not only religious.

Charles Krauthammer, a former member of the President's Council on Bioethics, lucidly articulated this point in a Washington Post column: "I don't believe that life -- meaning the attributes and protections of personhood -- begins at conception. Yet many secularly inclined people such as myself have great trepidation about the inherent dangers of wanton and unrestricted manipulation -- to the point of dismemberment -- of human embryos. You don't need religion to tremble at the thought of unrestricted embryo research. You simply have to have a healthy respect for the human capacity for doing evil in pursuit of the good."

- While the search for cures is an important motive behind ESC research, it is clearly not the only motive.

Most scientists acknowledge that ESCs will not provide therapies for many years, if ever. Their therapeutic potential is, at best, speculative. They cannot be used now, even in clinical trials, because of their tendency to produce tumors. So it comes as no surprise that many scientists now admit that their primary interest in pursuing ESC research lies not in the hope for direct cell transplant therapies, but in the desire to enhance basic scientific knowledge of such things as cell signaling, tissue growth and early human development.

We believe that embryo-destructive research cannot be morally justified, even if it really were likely to produce cures for dreaded afflictions. We fervently share the desire for cures, but we believe that biomedical science compromises its own integrity when it destroys human life in the cause of trying to save it.

We acknowledge, though, that many of our fellow citizens are people of good will who see things differently. They do not believe that a human life in its earliest stages enjoys the moral inviolability that it would acquire if permitted to develop to later stages. The disagreement here is deep and serious, but it should not be permitted to obscure the important points of agreement that should exist between citizens on the competing sides.

Mr. George is a professor of jurisprudence at Princeton University and a member of the President's Council on Bioethics. Rev. Berg is executive director of the Westchester Institute for Ethics and the Human Person.